

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 IO-13 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00
INRE-00 MCT-01 SY-05 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 EUR-12 /088 W
-----182232Z 124646 /46

O R 182200Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3754
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 1338

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, ES
SUBJECT: CHURCH-STATE TENSION GAINS MOMENTUM

REFS: (AL SAN SALVADOR 1234, (B) SAN SALVADOR 1289

1. THE SCENARIO OF EVENTS THAT BEGAN WITH THE ASSASSINATION OF THE JESUIT PRIEST GRANDE ON MARCH 12 (REFTEL A), AND EVOLVED INTO AN UNPREDICTABLE SERIES OF ACTIONS BY ARCHBISHOP ROMERO CHALLENGING THE GOVERNMENT TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THE MURDER AND CASE HARASSMENT OF THE CHURCH (REFTEL B), CONTINUES IN UNPREDICTABLE MOTION.

2. THE EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT THE ARCHBISHOP SPENT A GOOD PART OF YESTERDAY, THURSDAY, RECEIVING DELEGATIONS FROM VARIOUS SECTORS (INCLUDING THE GOES) PLEADING WITH HIM TO RESCIND HIS ORDER CANCELING ALL MASSES THIS SUNDAY WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A SINGLE CEREMONY IN SAN SALVADOR'S CATHEDRAL. ONE OF THE MORE IMPORTANT VISITORS WHO

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ARGUED AGAINST THE ARCHBISHOP'S PRESENT COURSE WAS THE PAPAL NUNCIO.

3. ONE EMBASSY CONTACT WITHIN THE CHURCH DESCRIBED CONSTERNATION AMONG THE CHURCH'S MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS FOLLOWERS. FIRST, THE ARCHBISHOP REACHED THEIR CHILDREN BY NOT ONLY CLOSING ALL CATHOLIC

SCHOOLS FOR THREE DAYS, BUT BY SENDING THE CHILDREN HOME WITH THE SELECTED WORKS OF POPE JOHN XXIII AND VATICAN II TO STUDY AND WRITE REPORTS ON BY NEXT MONDAY. NOW THE CHURCH IS REACHING OUT TO THE WOMEN OF THE COUNTRY, WHO MAKE UP THE GREATER PART OF SUNDAY MASS GOERS. DESPITE THE DISQUIET AND PROTESTS, THE ARCHBISHIP APPEARS DETERMINED TO GO ON.

4. ONE REASON MIGHT BE THE UNACCUSTOMED SOLIDARITY OF THE SALVADORAN CLERGY WITH THE ARCHBISHOP'S STANCE. ANOTHER MIGHT DERIVE FROM OTHER DELEGATIONS REPORTERLY CALLING ON THE ARCHBISHOP, ATTEMPTING TO PROP HIM UP WITH BACKBONE BUILDING MATERIAL. FOR EXAMPLE, ONE GROUP BROUGHT HIM A CATECHIST FROM A REMOTE VILLAGE WHO HAD BEEN ARRESTED AND "CRUCIFIED" (BOUND TO A CROSS), NOT ONCE BUT TWICE, BY THE NATIONAL GUARD.

5. THE GOVERNMENT IS CONCERNED WITH WHAT THE SUNDAY CATHEDRAL MASS MIGHT BRING. THE CHURCH IS TOO. THE REGIME, HALFWAY THROUGH ITS THIRTY-DAY STATE OF SIEGE, MUST FORMULATE A CORRECT RESPONSE TO THE EXPECTED THOUSANDS OF WORSHIPPERS WHOSZILL PROBABLY ILLEGALLY SPILL OUT OF THE CATHEDRAL AND INTO THE DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC PATTERN. THE CHURCH IS WORRIED THAT LEFTIST EXTREMISTS MIGHT TRY TO USE THE CROWD FOR THEIR OWN ENDS. A MISSTEP ON EITHER SIDE COULD RESULT IN CAUSE FOR EVEN WORSE TENSION AND TURMOIL.

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